

School Consolidation Task Force Meeting – HCR 39

October 16, 2017 - Meeting Minutes

William Penn High School

New Castle, DE

Members Present:

Representative Earl Jaques, House of Representatives – Chair of Task Force
Secretary Susan Bunting, Secretary of Education
Ciro Adams, Wilmington City Councilman
D. Dusty Blakey, Colonial School District, Superintendent
Mark Dufendach, Vo-Tech School District Representative
Loretta Greig, Kent County School District Parent
Mary Nash Wilson, Office of Management and Budget
Robert Overmiller, Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens
Jon Sheehan, Education Policy to the Governor
Senator David Sokola, Delaware Senate
Jeff Taschner, Delaware State Education Association (DSEA), Executive Director
Gerald Allen, School Board member
Dusty Blakey, Superintendent Colonial School District
David Blowman, Department of Education
Representative Stephanie Bolden, House of Representatives
Kevin Carson, Seaford School District Director of Administrative Services
Tammy Croce, Delaware Association of School Administrators
Mary Cooke, Human Resources, Capital School District
Jill Floore, Parent/Guardian from Wilmington Public School District
Nacole Gardner, Parent/Guardian from a New Castle County Public School
Susan Haberstroh, Department of Education
John Marinucci, Delaware School Board
Kendall Massett, Charter School
Angeline Rivello, Department of Education
Fred Sears, Sub-committee Chair Financial
Dan Shelton, Superintendent Capital School District
John Skrobot, School Boards Association Designee
Sean Sokolowski

Members Absent:

Bob Andrzejewski, Brian Boyle, Heath Chasanov, Kevin Fitzgerald, Natalie Ganc,
Victoria Gehrt, Walt Gilefski, Lauren Hudson, Gina Jennings, Matthew Meyer, Joseph Miro,
Eugene Montano, Monica Moriak, Kevin Ohlandt, Michael Petit De Mange, Brian Pettyjohn,
Ronald Pierce, Jordon Rosen, Brian Stephan, Daniel Walker

Rep. Jaques, chair of the task force, called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

Rep. Jaques welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded the members of the public present that there would be a time for public comment at the end of the meeting. He encouraged those interested in speaking to sign-up on the sheet provided.

Rep. Jaques presented the meeting minutes from the last meeting, held on September 18, 2017 to the task force for approval.

A motion was made by Fred Sears and seconded by Robert Overmiller to approve the minutes. The motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

Rep. Jaques called for the sub-committee chairs to present their sub-committee reports.

Secretary Susan Bunting, Chair of the Academics and Student Needs Sub-Committee, stated that they have not held a meeting since the taskforce last met so she had nothing new to report.

Fred Sears, Chair of the Finance Sub-Committee, stated that a meeting was held on October 5th at the Haslet Armory in Dover. He states that the sub-committee feels consolidation means there will be extra cash and it will go back to individual districts and students and it is looking at other states which have done consolidation to see how it worked for them.

Dusty Blakey, Chair of the Teachers & Staff Sub-Committee, stated that they have not met since the September 18th meeting. The sub-committee needs to look at possible data points from various groups that will be impacted by whichever direction the task force decides to go. He stated that the sub-committee is waiting for more direction from the larger taskforce as to what consolidation may or may not look like before moving forward.

Kevin Carson, Chair of the Structures Sub-Committee, stated that the second sub-committee meeting was held September 27th at St. Georges High School. He shared that there was a good conversation discussing the impact on district office functions, specifically on the business finance side, personnel, nutrition, and facilities. He stated that they have requested information from districts of the current economies of scale and they have also made some suggestions for improvements in the future. The next meeting will be held on November 29th at Legislative Hall.

Rep. Jaques mentioned that the School Consolidation taskforce reached out to the public through an article in the News Journal. He stated that they received 146 written comments, ideas and suggestions. The structures sub-committee took the submissions and worked them down to a reasonable number of categories that the taskforce could address. The taskforce will be taking public comment from the Woodbridge meeting and meeting tonight at William Penn to determine the task force's future direction. The sub-groups will be reporting out on their efficiencies and path forward. The taskforce will work on ways to have the best use of resources and plans to bring forward five suggestions for the taskforce to continue. The five suggestions are 1) to keep the districts as is with no changes, 2) districts as is with more consolidated services, primarily at the district office level, 3) keeping districts as is with the only change being to keep districts from crossing county lines, 4) changing to a county-wide revenue base while keeping the 19 school districts, and 5) county-wide school districts.

Mr. Blowman started his presentation, which included graphs on general enrollment trends, including those of charter schools, non-public schools, and special education over time, as well as the geographic

positioning and spread of students with different needs in relation to where schools are located. The full presentation can be found at the task force website.¹

Rep. Jaques opened the floor to the task force to ask questions on the presentation.

Senator David Sokola commented that there is one school district that crosses the state line: Delmar School District. He explained that Delaware students in the city of Delmar attend elementary school in Maryland and Maryland students in the city attend secondary school in Delaware.

John Skrobot asked if the blue line represents a combination of traditional and charter schools. Mr. Blowman replied that it does and also includes vocational schools.

Rep. Jaques asked if there were any more questions from the task force for Mr. Blowman. Seeing none, he opened the floor for public comment and explained that each person would get two minutes to speak.

Mr. Bob Williams stated that Delaware is in a crisis because employers have pulled out of Delaware due to lack of direction in education. He argued that it was unfair to include all schools as college preparatory when some are meant to be career-based. Mr. Williams stated that the vo-tech schools need to be expanded and brought into the 21st century. Mr. Williams said it is unfair for students from Wilmington to have to spend two hours on buses to get to and from school and that the schools should be in the neighborhoods where students are served.

Rep. Jaques commented that he and Sen. Sokola held a public forum in the spring to discuss college affordability and readiness.

Mary Shorsie, a public education advocate, spoke next. She explained that she had not planned on speaking but decided to follow up on an earlier comment made and to ask the task force a question. Ms. Shorsie stated that education in Delaware is very complex, and that the maps in the presentation are very interesting. Ms. Shorsie was curious about the five options and asked where the data came from that these were created from, an answer was not provided. Ms. Shorsie stated that it sounded to her it was status quo and that a little of administrative consolidation or countywide, and it seems like the findings were like two opposite ends of the spectrum.

Ron Russo spoke next and stated that he has attended a few meetings of the finance sub-committee and attended the last meeting and Mr. Russo has reached the conclusion that certain steps have to be taken before the taskforce could carry out their decisions. Mr. Russo did not go into further detail. Mr. Russo stated that the funding formula from 2002 study was seen as nonsense by him. Mr. Russo said that the taskforce needs to improve public education.

Mike Matthews, spoke next and thanked Mr. Sears for his comments on school district finance. He said he was glad to be making sure students and schools have resources especially for Special Education, English language and urged members of taskforce to listen to what is going on. During his visits to schools in the state, there have been many questions around the taskforce, people want to know what is going on and when it will be complete. He said that the goal of the taskforce should not be to save

¹ The powerpoint file of Mr. Blowman's presentation, including the comments and explanations can be found on the task force website (www.tinyurl.com/SCTaskforceDE17) at the bottom of the page. The file is titled: *Consolidation Task Force Presentation from DOE with legend and definitions 09-18-17*

money. The state has an ever evolving population of students, and the number of special education students has increased significantly; the state is not meeting obligations to special education and the taskforce should keep this in mind.

Rep. Jaques thanked those who shared their comments with the task force and reminded everyone in attendance that the next meeting would be on October 25th at Caesar Rodney High School in Camden, DE.

Rep. Jaques asked if there were any further questions or comments from the task force members; seeing none, he adjourned the meeting at 7:12 pm.